To realize the PROMISE of every Vermont child

Promise Community Handbook

Cohort Two 2016

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Promise Communities Handbook

Helping Vermont to Fulfill the Promise of Every Child

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Promise Communities Overview

The Promise Community Initiative is one of 24 projects in the Early Learning Challenge- Race to the Top grant awarded to the state of Vermont by the federal Departments of Education and Health and Human Services.

Promise Communities is a place based initiative working in specific, identified geographical areas. In a Promise Community, people and organizations form a partnership and commit to doing whatever it takes to help turn the curve for improved outcomes for young children and families in that community. Outcomes include increasing school readiness and closing the achievement gap by 3rd grade for children with high needs.

The Promise Community Initiative provides supports, such as a Promise Community Technical Assistant for each community, financial supports, and information, to help local communities, work together across sectors – health, education, human services and community planning. With Early Learning Challenge- Race to the Top funding, we hope to reach 18-23 communities in Vermont over the next three years. Planning is family centered, research based, and reflective: communities use Results Based Accountability as a method to develop strategies and indicators. The Strengthening Families Framework and other related activities are employed to engage and support families.
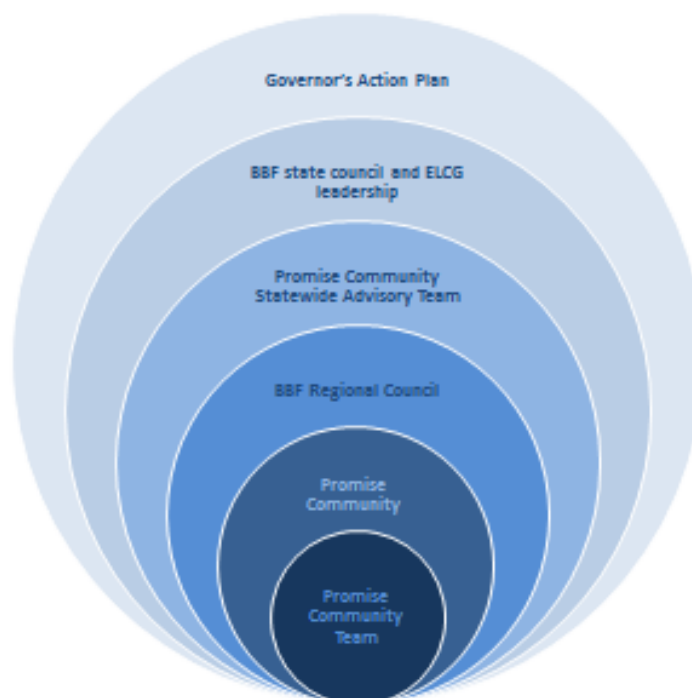
A Project Director oversees program implementation with a statewide advisory team of representatives from diverse stakeholder groups, see appendix A for listing of stakeholders. Promise Community Technical Assistance is from the Promise Community team to support communities with general information and overviews of the initiative and specific support on Community Engagement and Results Based Accountability.

A Promise Community is about the community coming together to support the children and families that live there. Service providers in communities can offer one perspective on the people who live there, yet the neighbors are the one who can make the biggest impact. Promise communities want to engage neighbors to improve the outcomes of young children.

Vermont's Early Learning Challenge Grant

Vermont's Early Learning Challenge – Race to the Top Grant (ELC) is a $36.9 million federally funded, four year grant to help build a high-quality and accessible early childhood system so that all young children in Vermont will be ready to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. The grant rapidly advances Vermont's larger reform agenda by serving as a "jumpstart" to Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan. Grant implementation is led by the Governor's Office in partnership with the VT Agency of Education, the VT Department for Children and Families, the VT Department of Health, and Building Bright Futures.

Building Bright Futures (BBF) serves a dual role as both the Vermont Early Childhood Advisory Council and a 501(c)(3) statewide network, aligning local solutions of 12 regional Councils with policy at the state level in order to make improvements in access, quality, and affordability of early care, health, and education for families and young children 0-8. BBF acts as a regional link between the smaller Promise Communities and regional efforts to turn the curve for early childhood.

What will ELC do?

Improve Quality and Access
- ❖ Increase participation in the VT STARS quality rating program so that families will be able to access high quality programs in every VT community.
- ❖ Develop and implement a Pre-K monitoring system to ensure high quality Pre-Kindergarten education programs.
- ❖ Improve high-quality home visiting services to pregnant women and young children and support parents as their children's first teachers.
- ❖ Ensure all children with high needs have access to quality early care and education through the Specialized Child Care program.

Invest in People
- ❖ Award $900,000 in scholarships through the VAEYC T.E.A.C.H. program for Early Care professionals wishing to pursue a license or a degree.
- ❖ Expand the VT Child Care Apprenticeship program to provide free college courses and formal on-the-job mentoring.
- ❖ Offer training and coaching in the revised VT Early Learning Standards to better support the learning and development of children with high needs.

Empower Communities
- ❖ Identify Promise Communities in rural areas to support improved outcomes for children with high needs.

- ❖ Improve the power of communities to impact child and family well-being by strengthening the statewide Building Bright Futures network and its 12 Regional Councils.
- ❖ Host Help Me Grow through VT 2-1-1 to provide information, support, community resources and referrals related to early childhood and childhood development, including developmental screening resources.

Ensure We Are Making a Difference
- ❖ Revise VT's Kindergarten Readiness Survey to make sure we have valid and reliable assessment data to measure children's learning and development.
- ❖ Expand vermontinsights.org as an online toolbox that helps Vermonters leverage meaningful data to guide policies that improve the well-being of children, families and communities.
- ❖ Connect early childhood data to Vermont's K-12 State Longitudinal Data System in the Agency of Education.

The Early Learning Challenge grant strengthens a system to support early learning, and the healthy physical, social, and emotional development of children with high needs to lay the foundation for future success of all Vermont's children. Grant supported initiatives narrow the opportunity gap between high needs children and their peers before it occurs, so that all children are able to thrive and grow up to contribute to a vibrant economic future for our state.

History of Place Based Initiatives

Communities are embracing place based initiatives all across the country. One of the leading efforts comes from the Harlem Children's Zone, which began in the 1990's with a one block pilot project. It has grown to serve children and families in 97 city blocks of New York. Building on the success of the program, efforts have been made to duplicate the model and reach out into other cities to support children and families in poverty to help children succeed in school and beyond. Through the Early Learning Challenge federal grant several states have developed place based initiatives. Vermont is on the forefront to address the nature of rural poverty and develop a community initiative in this way. Some other state programs are called Promise Neighborhoods and Transformation Zones. How they operate to support families varies from program specific initiatives to more open community level planning and ranging in ages from early childhood to young adults in families.

Frameworks

The Vermont Promise Community Initiative designs and delivers our work within evidence based frameworks:

Collective Impact
Collective Impact is a framework for social change that uses the following five conditions to maximize the impact of coalitions: **Common Agenda, Shared Measurement, Mutual Reinforcing Activities, Continuous Communication, and Backbone Support**. Doing complex work across agencies, organizations, and stakeholder groups can be difficult and complicated but ultimately provides us with

deeper and wider reaching wins. By utilizing the evidence based framework on Collective Impact we can achieve maximum synergy and impact and hopefully minimize some of the pitfalls.
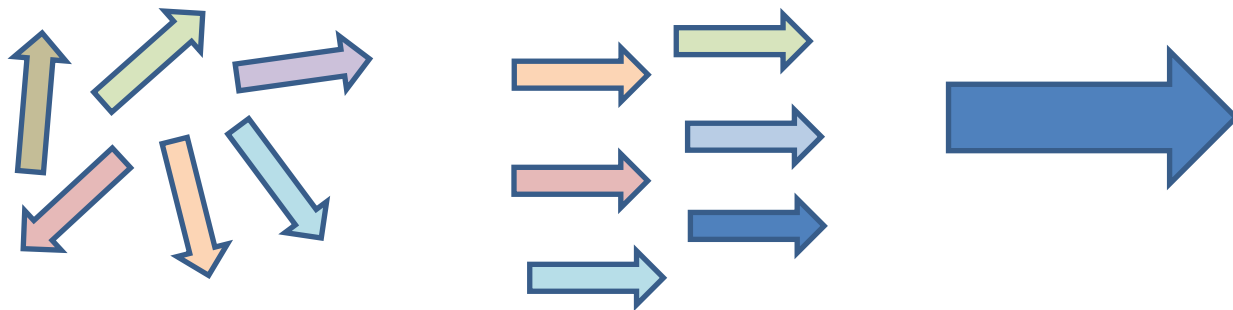
Strengthening Families

Promise Communities aim to strengthen the ties that bind communities— making families more resilient regardless of income or need. Promise Community Technical Assistants will approach the relationship between communities and families from the perspective of a protective factors framework. This evidence based framework promoted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) (http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies) is being disseminated throughout Vermont in a variety of efforts. The framework provides the community with a coherent vision of how communities support families and in turn promote healthy outcomes for all children*.* CSSP describes five identified protective factors that support families and children: **Parent Resilience, Social Connections, Concrete Support in Times of Need, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Social and Emotional Competencies in Children**. The Promise Community Initiative integrates these five factors into goal setting, needs assessment design, and planning processes to ensure families stay in the forefront in our work.

Results Based Accountability

In 2014 the Vermont legislature enacted legislation requiring the use of Results Based Accountability (RBA) for the monitoring and planning of any state government programs. This is a framework from the work of Mark Friedman as a disciplined manner of thinking about results. RBA asks three key questions to understand if anyone is better off as a result of the work – How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?

Promise Communities   will use the RBA framework to begin asking these questions in the planning phase to ensure that communities are measuring the right things to demonstrate success – the work has made children and families in the communities "better off". RBA is especially relevant to coalition/ Collective Impact work as it clearly explains the connection between what changes happened for everyone and the difference a particular effort makes. Communities will have support from the Promise Community Technical Assistants to walk communities through this process. Each community offers its own unique assets. These qualities will be incorporated into the work of the Promise Communities as each community will discover their own solutions.

Promise Community Selection Process

This is the process being used for selecting the second cohort of Promise Communities:

1. A Request for Applications posting on Child Development Website and distributed through email lists including Building Bright Futures and partner stakeholders. Application details are posted on the Child Development Division website: http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/promise_communities June 10, 2016
2. Webinar informational session about the application process and expectations was offered two weeks after information was shared. June 29, 2016
3. Applications are received approximately two months from posting. August 15, 2016
4. Applications are reviewed by a selection committee using a scoring rubric, also found on the website (http://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/promise_communities). Selection committee represented individuals from the governor's office, Early Learning Challenge grant, human services, health, education and other state community partners.
5. Communities will be announced at the end of August of 2016.

How do we select a Promise Community?

Promise Communities is a project of the Early Learning Challenge Grant (read more here: http://buildingbrightfutures.org/early-learning-challenge/) and shares the grant-wide goal of improving kindergarten readiness for children with high needs. In selecting communities, we will also consider 3 other indicators of "high needs": access to early care and education, third grade reading scores, and percentage of children eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Priority selection will be given to higher need communities based on data from Vermont Insights and those that have a dedicated, diverse coalition ready to collaborate on the work. Additional points are given to communities in response to a series of questions about the community in the application form.

What makes a Promise Community?

The Promise Community Initiative recognizes that communities have a responsibility and unique capacity to work together to improve outcomes for children and families. Communities selected to participate in the process are given support and resources to create an innovative plan that will transform their communities and improve school readiness for children with high needs.

A Promise Community is identified by a coalition of people who are committed to supporting the young children of their community. The work of the coalition is to ask: What is working well for families and young children in our community? What changes need to be made for the young children in our community to succeed? Communities considering applying for the initiative define their own catchment area, however the geographic area must reasonably define itself as a contiguous community and contain at least one elementary school. More than one school can collaborate and communities can cross Supervisory Unions. The defined community must be home to more than 40 children under the age of 6.

Opportunities and Expectations for Promise Community Cohort 2

Opportunities:

Each Promise Community receives extensive training, a collaboration toolkit, continual technical assistance support, connections to state wide opportunities for the local community, and up to $120,000 to implement their identified strategies.

Each Promise Community must establish a Promise Community coalition; this can build off an existing coalition or be a new group. The coalition should include broad representation across sectors. Each participating community must gather a team of at least 8 people from within the broader coalition to commit to full participation in training sessions; and they will serve as the steering committee members (we are looking for teams of 8-12 to participate in the trainings).

Promise Communities of Vermont will gather for 3 training sessions in Killington, VT (October 17 &18, 2016-overnight; March 15, 2017; June 6, 2017). Session topics are as follows:

Session 1: What does it mean to be a Promise Community? Learn about place based initiatives, Collective Impact (CI), Results Based Accountability (RBA) and Strengthening Families (SF)

Session 2: Identifying the narrative of your community and developing a plan (RoadMap) to improve kindergarten readiness.

Session 3: How are you changing that narrative to improve the lives of children? What is working well for families and young children in your community? What do you need to change in your community for the young children to succeed in school?

Expectations:

Each Promise Community must:

- Commit to thinking differently about how communities support young children and families to get to the heart of what works.
- Engage in regular community conversations to ensure family voice, leadership, and collaboration.
- Use Collective Impact and RBA as guiding frameworks in your work and process.
- Convene regular local meetings of the Promise Community coalition to develop the Promise Community roadmap (weekly to monthly).
- Commit to biweekly check-ins with Promise Community Technical Assistance.
- Support the implementation of your Promise Community Roadmap.
- Collaborate with the Promise Community evaluation team to develop and collect short term data; and develop a longitudinal data plan to track the progress of the work, beyond the time of the Early Learning Challenge grant participation.
- Develop an effective collaborative group that ensures the sustainability of the Promise Community plan.

Promise Community Technical Assistance Team

Promise Community Technical Assistant RBA will provide support to the communities by:

- Providing training to communities in large group settings about Results Based Accountability
- Providing the team expertise on Results Based Accountability
- Assisting communities towards development of strong collaborative teams
- Working with communities to understand, and apply RBA process towards their work.

Promise Community Technical Assistant Community Engagement will provide support to the communities by:

- Providing training to communities in large group settings about Community Engagement
- Providing the team expertise on Community Engagement, keeping in mind the contextual framework of Strengthening Families
- Working with communities on developing community outreach activities
- Assisting communities towards development of strong collaborative teams

Promise Community Team Building

The Promise Community team is the core of the Promise Communities planning process. It is important to strike a balance between openness to new ideas and members while maintaining a core set of norms and work flow. At initial launch sessions Promise Community Technical Assistants will lead the group to set the following parameters for themselves:

- Develop group norms of behavior
- Support rotating group roles
- Develop strategies to invite others to join
- Guide the preliminary definition of community
- Support a shared mission for moving forward
- Expand how Strengthening Families effects the Promise Communities
- Establish a shared decision making processes

Promise Community Roadmap

The Promise Communities Roadmap serves as the primary planning document and funding/grant application for each community. Drafting of the plan is an inclusive process, with all community members and stakeholders invited to participate. The communities answer the following questions:

Promise Community- Proposal Template

1. Introduction
    a. Who is the Community?
    b. Who are the team players?

      c.   How is the team structured? Describe how people participate in the Promise Community work and describe the leadership structure. Address how Collective Impact has influenced the team's process.

2. Methodology - Process
   a. How did the team gather and review Information? Including data, community voices, and existing needs assessments?
   b. How is community voice present in the decision making process?

3. Data – Snapshot of the Community
   a. Population
   b. Kindergarten readiness scores
   c. 3rd grade achievement score literacy and math
   d. 4&5 STAR Early Care and Education Programs

4. Population Accountability
   a. What are the quality of life conditions we want for the children, adults and families who live in our community?
   b. What would these conditions look like if we could see them?
   c. How can we measure these conditions?
   d. How are we doing on the *most important* of these measures?
      1. Indicators baseline and story (use the Results-Based Accountability template: Data, Communication, Proxy Powers for each indicator)
   e. Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
   f. What works to do better?
      1. How is the community maximizing resources-leveraging all the community has to support the efforts of the Promise Community, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?

5. What do we propose to do and why do we propose doing it that way?
      1. Describe the plan to continue to engage the community.
      2. Collective Impact: How will the team continue to work together?
      3. Is there leadership to sustain work in the community?
      4. Are the strategies evidence based or data informed?
      5. How does the plan integrate and address the Strengthening Families Protective Factors?
      6. What quick wins/low hanging fruit do you plan to implement?
      7. What are the long term outcomes?
      8. Describe the rational and justification of planned strategies.
      9. What is the plan to continue these strategies after grant funding ends?
      10. How is the group resilient; meaning committed to the strategies to meet community needs based on evaluation findings?
      11. Will the strategy help accelerate equity among sub-populations and otherwise underrepresented populations?

6. Budget

     a. Budget Narrative
          a. How is the community maximizing resources-leveraging all the community has to support the efforts, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?
          b. What is the plan to continue these strategies after grant funding ends?
          c. How is the budget justified by the strategies and scope of impact?
     b. Fiscal Agent(s)

Evaluation

The Child Development Division has contracted with Flint Springs Associates (FSA)to lead all Promise Community evaluation activities. The evaluation will be iterative and participatory so that communities can make informed decisions about their ongoing work. What FSA is responsible for:

Facilitate a participatory process to create an evaluation plan. FSA staff will structure and facilitate discussions intended to identify and gain agreement on:

- Concrete measures for evaluating services and supports (program performance efforts) that will be implemented
- Concrete measures for evaluating client outcomes resulting from those efforts (better offs)
- Concrete indicators of community change

FSA will provide each local team with a draft evaluation plan that identifies:

- Population and program performance measures
- Specific data needed for each of these measures
- Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interviews, survey, accessing existing data)
- Data collection tools (e.g., Structured Interview, Strengthening Families Survey, Collaboration Survey)
- Data collection responsibilities including who will collect data
- Data collection and reporting timelines

Local Promise Communities will use existing tools when appropriate for data collection around certain measures. FSA will develop tools that are needed to conduct structured interviews and satisfaction surveys as well as create simple data reporting methods (e.g., use of Survey Monkey for entering and organizing data).

FSA will provide training and a range of technical assistance to promise Community team members. FSA will determine on a site-by-site basis whether to provide group or individual trainings to designated collectors. Written guidelines and instructions for using data collection tools will be embedded in each tool, making the collector's job as clear as possible.

Implementation

1. Promise Communities will use the Roadmap to guide implementation, making it a "living document" – leading community work and open for revision.
2. Financial support of *up to* $120,000 will be available to the community for specific implementation activities.
3. Technical Assistance to the communities is available, while we have grant funding, ensuring the communities remain on track to meet the roadmap and evaluation goals.
4. Throughout implementation process continuous improvement and planning processes with data tracking and feedback from evaluators will occur.
5. Clear ongoing community commitment and leadership to continue implementation.

Partners

As a collective impact – place based initiative, the Promise Community effort welcomes the involvement of any and all potential partners and stakeholders. At the state level, Promise Communities works with our stakeholder group and the Building Bright Futures council. At the community level we welcome participation from anyone (either neighbor or professional) to have an opportunity to influence the lives of children.

Building Bright Futures

The Building Bright Futures regional council is a close partner that aligns with the overall goals of Promise Communities working on a regional level many of the same challenges yet works at a broader level than the Promise Communities.

The role of BBF regional coordinators shifts throughout a community's timeline in the following way:

Application Process:

- Help to distribute the Promise Community Application to stakeholders and other regional partners- -such as sending emails through the BBF network, making space at BBF meetings for Promise Communities presentations when appropriate, offering contacts or introductions to the Promise Community team.
- In partnership with Building Bright Futures we are asking communities to connect with the regional coordinator to write the community application). The regional coordinator will work with your community to complete the application and submit on your behalf.
- Connect community stakeholders if they are interested in applying. For example, if they hear of two groups that are from the same specific geographic area- encourage these two groups to work together as one community.
- BBF Coordinators can submit applications for more than one community in their region.

Once Promise Communities have been identified in the region:

- Allow time on regional meeting agenda for Promise Community work progress, updates or announcements
- Promise Community local team will have a representative sit on both local Promise Community team and at the BBF regional council
- Share information about the BBF regional plan with the local Promise Community team
- Promise Communities will share Community Roadmap with BBF regional council
- Collaborate as seen fit, (e.g. Asset Mapping work)
- Reciprocal data sharing
- Sustain and support the Promise Community effort over time

The larger ELC grant is a partnership between the Agency of Education, the Agency of Human Services, and others; Promise Communities supports this collaboration and asks that these local partners participate at the local level.

School
Each Promise Community contains at least one elementary school. While the exact role of each school depends on the needs and dynamics of their community, across the state they will share the following role:

During the Application Process:

- School personnel are encouraged to participate in the application process.

Once Promise Communities have been identified in the region:

- Participate on local Promise Community team
- If possible, serve on the steering committee and attend all the statewide trainings
- Data sharing with both evaluation team and local Promise Communities team.

Community Partners
We encourage the community to be active members of the local team, see team composition below.

- Commit to thinking differently about how communities support young children and families to get to the heart of what works
- Attend regular meetings of the Promise Community collaborators to develop the Promise Community roadmap (weekly to monthly)
- Support the implementation of the plan
- Collaborate with an evaluation team to develop and collect short term data; and develop a longitudinal data plan to track the progress of the work, beyond the time of the coach participation
- Collaborate with the various partners to allow for sustainability of the Promise Community roadmap
- Support equity of planning and participation throughout the Promise Communities.

Team Composition:

- Steering Committee Team *must* include:
  - 2-3 People who live in the community (preferable parents with children)
- Steering Committee Teams *can* include:
  - Representatives from local human services
  - Early Care and Education representatives
  - Representative from local schools
  - Representative from health services
  - Representative from the local Parent Child Center
  - Local Librarian
  - Arts organizations
  - Faith community
  - Business Community
  - Local government (like: legislator, select board member, town clerk)
  - People in the community familiar with the Promise Community frameworks (Collective Impact, Strengthening Families and Results Based Accountability)

Contact Information

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Appendix A- Stakeholder Members

Organization	Representative	contact information
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VT Business Round table- VT Business for Social Responsibility	Andrea Cohen	
Arts Council	Alex Aldrich	aaldrich@vermontartscouncil.org;
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Appendix B- Promise Communities Bibliography

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